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International students' motivation and attitudes towards
learning English and Czech in the Czech Republic

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Abstract

Living abroad is a very common experience for university students nowadays, and at the same time it is very useful to improve one's level of English or a local language. The Czech Republic, and particularly the city of Brno, is a very common destination for international students to live for an Erasmus period of the full degree. Accordingly, this essay also shows how the role of motivation when learning a foreign language is a key one. In this sense, one may think that learning Czech is what these international students want to do but this paper will explain how this potential objective is thwarted by many factors which will make most students give up on it. English is crucial to live in the Czech Republic and as such, it is what students communicate in and feel motivated to improve.

Resumen

Hoy en día vivir en el extranjero es una experiencia muy común entre estudiantes universitarios, y de la misma manera, es muy útil para mejorar el nivel de inglés o de la lengua local. La República Checa, y particularmente la ciudad de Brno es un destino muy común para estudiantes internacionales que buscan vivir en el extranjero durante una estancia Erasmus o incluso todo el grado. A su vez, este ensayo también demuestra que el papel de la motivación cuando se aprende un idioma extranjero es crucial. Por ello, uno puede pensar que los estudiantes internacionales estudian checo, pero este ensayo mostrará cómo este fenómeno está desfavorecido por distintos factores que harán que los estudiantes prefieran no estudiar checo. El inglés es esencial para vivir en la República Checa y por lo tanto, es en lo que los estudiantes se comunican y se sienten motivados a mejorar.

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1. Introduction

The purpose of this dissertation is to show how different factors can enhance, or else decrease, the motivation for learning a second or foreign language among Erasmus or full-degree students in the Czech Republic, to see how these factors affect and correlate with each other, and to find an explanation to these relations. This dissertation is thus intended to provide qualitative data and conclusions suitable for or applicable to the improvement of language planning or policy as well as the study of second language acquisition (SLA). Motivation is a concept that everyone knows about, and that is present in many aspects of life (Deci & Ryan, 2014). Although many times motivation is not given much importance, the truth is that it plays a key role in our language-learning decisions and actions, and it is of course influenced by many variables both inside the individuals and in their surroundings (Dörnyei, 2005).

I decided to go on Erasmus to the Czech Republic for my last year of university, and what has called my attention is the little importance that most international students give to learning Czech. After many months here, there are students who do not have any knowledge of the Czech language; who have made no effort at all to learn it, while others do show some interest. Motivation is crucial here, because unmotivated learners are more likely to fail in achieving their goal, whether it is fluency or simply knowing the basics. What motivates exchange students to start learning a local language such as Czech? Why do some students prefer to spend more time studying English instead? Questions such as these, among others, are discussed along this dissertation.

Motivation in second language learning is a very complex idea and is influenced by many factors, which, according to Gardner (2005), include the following: purpose(s) for learning the language, perception of its community of speakers, instrumentality and complexity of the language itself. All these factors, in addition to many others which are later

discussed, are variable in each individual, and they eventually determine how motivated the student feels. Similarly, although motivation is not the only factor that affects the learning process, the role it plays is many times decisive. It is for these reasons that I have decided that motivation should be the main topic of my final degree dissertation, and more specifically, international students' attitudes and motivation towards learning Czech and English during their stay in the Czech Republic as Erasmus or full degree students.

Given the purpose of this dissertation, a questionnaire was used and some interviews were carried out. This methodology was chosen because it allows the researcher to analyze the issue from multiple perspectives, which provides a clear picture of the problem (Creswell, 2013; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2012). The survey contains personal questions such as age or country of origin, as well as statements in which the participants had to answer about the degree of agreement or disagreement they see themselves placed in. These statements measured the different variables that affect motivation and attitudes towards learning both Czech and English in the Czech Republic. The percentages of the replies as well as the different answers to the personal questions were later analyzed in order to show the tendencies, irregularities and correlations.

2. Definitions

To begin with, the meaning of motivation should be adapted to the context of the present study. In the *Longman Dictionary of Contemporary English* motivation is defined as the “eagerness and willingness to do something without needing to be told or forced to do it” (Longman, 2017), making special emphasis on the idea that motivation is something that arises from the individual. In the case of second language acquisition, following Longman's definition, motivation refers to the willingness to learn the language in question. However, as Robert Gardner (2006) —one of the most well-known authors regarding motivation and SLA

—points out, motivation in second language acquisition is “more complex than merely wanting to learn the language” (p. 1). He claims that motivation is “multifaceted”, and as such, it “comprises at least ten cognitive, affective and conative components”. Taking into account these characteristics, the definition that Richards and Schmidt (2002) provide is particularly accurate; “(motivation) refers to a combination of the learner’s attitudes, desires and willingness to expend effort in order to learn the second language”, “the driving force”. In this definition, attitude, desire and effort are highlighted, and, as they are very important constructs in the realization of motivation, these ideas are discussed and analyzed later in this paper.

Having defined what motivation means, the question that may arise is what it means to be a motivated individual. The characteristics that describe a motivated person are not always clear, but Gardner (2005) mentions the ones that are easily recognized within an individual:

Motivated individuals express effort in attaining the goal, they show persistence, and they attend to the tasks necessary to achieve the goals. They have a strong desire to attain their goal, and they enjoy the activities necessary to achieve their goal. They are aroused in seeking their goals, they have expectancies about their successes and failures, and when they are achieving some degree of success they demonstrate self-efficacy; they are self-confident about their achievements. Finally, they have reasons for their behavior, [...] (p. 4)

Most of these characteristics are considered and explored in the section of analysis of this essay. These features reflect three different components —cognitive, affective and conative— that characterize motivation. They define what a person needs in order to be motivated, and they are, of course, malleable. Similarly, these aspects are influenced by others, such as aptitude, personality traits, and age and its inevitable companions, among others.

Now that the motivation construct in second language acquisition has been defined, it is important to outline the differences with the concept of orientation. Orientation is the reason why one decides to study a foreign language —here, Czech and English. In Gardner's (2010) words "an orientation is the overall aim, purpose, direction, and/or goal of the activity", and contrary to common thought, orientations do not always imply motivation. Orientations can be of two types, integrative orientations "reflect a desire of becoming part of a community", however, they need to be accompanied by some kind of motivation, otherwise there is not motivation (Gardner, 2010). The second type of orientations is instrumental, and they serve practical goals. For instance, in the questionnaire analyzed in this paper, one of the statements to measure is "Studying English is important to me in order to achieve a special goal (e.g. to get a degree or scholarship)". In this case the purpose for studying is merely instrumental and bears no relation to the community of speakers of that language.

Taking into consideration all the features that the motivational construct comprises and for the purpose of this dissertation, three other concepts are to be defined. Language is a social phenomenon and as such, its study should consider socially relevant factors such as its community of speakers. Thus, Gardner and Lambert (1972) labelled the term "Integrativeness" to refer to "the individual being interested in learning the language in order to interact with valued members of the other community", and in general terms, in its culture. The way in which this is linked to motivations is clear; if an individual shows interest in the other linguistic community, he or she will show a higher degree of motivation. Another concept that is related to the way one perceives society is that of "ethnocentrism", and it also plays a major role in motivation and SLA and is measured in the questionnaire. Ethnocentrism, as the sociologist William G. Sumner (1906) defined it, is "the technical name for the view of things in which one's own group is the center of everything, and all others are scaled and rated with reference to it", he also claimed that ethnocentrism often

leads to pride, vanity the belief in one's own group's superiority, and contempt for outsiders. This phenomenon is very likely to decrease motivation in students, since it could somehow be understood as the opposite to integrativeness. In other words, if a student shows integrativeness, that involves he or she has an open interest in other cultural communities in general; therefore, there is an absence of Ethnocentrism or Xenophilic attitudes (Gardner, 2006).

Another concept very often found in research on motivation and SLA is instrumentality. Dörnyei and Ushioda (2009) define it as “the pragmatic utility of learning the L2” (p. 26); that is to say, the learner's purpose to be more proficient in L2 is for practical reasons, unrelated to his or her view of the community of speakers. In Gardner's words (2005), instrumentality refers to “conditions where the language is being studied for practical or utilitarian purposes”. It is important to highlight that this concept refers to the orientation and not the motivation; one may have an instrumental orientation to learn a language but not be motivated at all. Gardner also remarks that, in contrast with the integrative orientation, students who have an instrumental orientation will not be highly motivated for a long period of time (2005).

3. Methods

The study presented in this dissertation is based on mixed-methods research (MMR). It consisted of a questionnaire of 56 questions regarding the different variables and factors that affect motivation for learning English and Czech in the Czech Republic (<https://forms.gle/j4qs1GaSpdsYDJqCA>). The first group of questions are more clear-cut than the rest, as they are personal questions on age, sex, nationality, languages spoken and studies, which are intended to facilitate the analysis of how these variables correlate with each other as well as with the next groups of questions. Then, the length of stay in the Czech

Republic, as I believe there is a difference between one-semester Erasmus students and full degree students. Lastly in the first section and due to the fact that we are still living in the pandemic of Covid-19, I believe it is important to differentiate between students taking in-person or online courses, as the exposure to English and Czech is not the same in each case.

In the next section of the questionnaire there is a set of statements around learning English. Most of these statements have been adapted from *Motivation, Language and the L2 Self* (Dörnyei & Ushioda, 2009). The participants showed their degree of agreement with these statements by selecting numbers from 0, which means strong disagreement, and 5, which means the students agree entirely. There are eight statements that measure instrumentality in regard to English, for instance, “Studying English is important for me in order to achieve a special goal (to get a degree or scholarship)”. The next group of five questions is about international contact, with statements such as “I need English to make friends in the Czech Republic”. Following this group, there are four questions regarding students’ interest in foreign languages in general and milieu. The latter refers to the individuals’ social environment, which is why it includes statements like “Most people around me know English”. The last six questions are about the attitudes towards learning English and students’ effort; a way to measure students’ effort is, for instance, asking whether they “spend much time studying English” or if they “are taking a course”. There are two additional questions in the section; one of them is about the participant’s level of English, since this can also influence other motivational variables, and the other way around, and whether the student’s courses are in English, since the exposure to the language, a clear factor in motivation, varies considerably depending on this.

In the next section, very similar ideas are asked about the Czech language and community. How practical students think Czech is (i.e. instrumentality again) has been measured through statements such as “Czech is important in the world”. Students’ attitudes

towards the language was measured in terms of difficulty of the language or similarity to the student's mother tongue, among others, as this shows how the language itself is perceived by the learners and that perhaps determines whether or not a student decides to take up Czech. This reflects the cognitive component of attitude; a person's belief about the object, in this case Czech, influences how he or she will act. The effort they devote to learn Czech, also a key factor, is measured by asking the amount of time students dedicate to learning Czech, whether in an official course or just listening to the radio. Something different that was not measured in the English section is Ethnocentrism. In this case, the attitudes towards learning Czech do vary considerably if the student shows ethnocentrism.

The reason why this questionnaire has been conducted is because it is the most accurate way to measure variables in motivation. The participants have been able to show how they feel towards the different factors that define the motivated student, and after analyzing all this data there will be shown how it correlates and find an explanation for the relationships.

After the questionnaire, some personal interviews were carried out. These were useful to clarify the answers obtained in the survey as well as to exemplify the findings. The participants provided a more personal experience on their attitudes towards English, Czech both language and community. A total of 8 participants took part in the interviews, with different opinions and perceptions that were key for the analysis of this paper:

Number of participant	Age	Country of origin	Degree	Mother tongue	Other languages
1	20	Ukraine	Tourism	Russian	Ukrainian, Crimean Tatar, English
2	22	Spain	Medicine	Spanish	English
3	25	Spain	Pharmacy	Spanish	English, French, Italian

Number of participant	Age	Country of origin	Degree	Mother tongue	Other languages
4	23	Spain	Electronic Engineering	Spanish	English
5	23	Italy	Journalism	Italian	English
6	27	United Arab Emirates	Philosophy	Urdu	English, Arabic
7	23	Mexico	English Language and Literature	Spanish	English, French

4. Discussion of results

4.1. Results obtained in the survey

The total amount of answers obtained from the survey is 130.

In the first part of the questionnaire there are some personal questions. The first of them is age, which ranges from 17 to 27 years old. Most of the participants are either 20, 21, 22 or 23, as these are the most common ages to go on Erasmus. As for sex, there is a difference in the amount of females (60%) and males (37,7%), while the rest preferred not to specify (2.3%). In the next question, home country of the participants, there is a huge difference in the amount of Spanish students, who make up 61 out of 130 participants, that is 46,9% of the total. Two reasons for this have been found: my nationality is as well Spanish, so it has been easier in a sense to obtain answers from Spanish students, as I found myself closer to them. In addition, although I cannot say in exact numbers, the number of Spanish students who choose to go on Erasmus to the Czech Republic is higher than any other nationality, however the reason for this is not within the scope of this dissertation. Apart from Spain, there are answers from students from many other countries such as France and Belgium in Europe, also Asian countries like India, African ones such as Egypt and even students from Mexico, Colombia and other American countries.

Perhaps more useful to analyze than home country is first language. Most answers to this question have been European languages, however there are also less common languages such as Persian or Latvian. This paper will later show how this influences attitudes towards Czech and English.

The next question of this section has to do with the modality of the courses; either on-line, in-person or both, due to the pandemic in which we are living right now. This is relevant because of the exposure to languages. In the on-line modality, the lessons tend to be less dynamic and students have fewer chances to speak, whereas in-person lessons —the traditional method— allow students to participate and interact more with their partners. This has a say in the way students see the necessity to learn Czech or English because the opportunities they have to practice them are not the same in each case. The answers have been 83 students with online lessons only (63,8%), 9 students have all their classes in the in-class modality, and 38 students (29,2%) have both in-class and online teaching, probably because in the scientific degrees there are practice lessons that need to be in-person, so students end up having a combination of both methods, and also some teaching degrees that demand practical lessons.

The next question asks how long their stay is in the Czech Republic, and there are three options. There are 56 students who are staying 2 semesters, and almost the same number for 1 semester, with 51 students. The rest of the answers, 23, are full degree students. This question is related to several aspects of motivation. Students who are living abroad only for 4 to 6 months do not have the same time, exposure and necessity to learn Czech than those who are here for 10 months or of course, the full degree. The latter will be more likely to become fluent in both English and Czech, and he or she will learn the languages for different reasons than those of an Erasmus student. The last question of this section asks the number of languages that students can speak. Most students speak 3 languages (42,3%) or 2

(38,5%), and, as it is commonly thought, the more languages one knows, the easier it is to learn more, so there is a clear correlation between these variables as it will be later shown.

The following sections present several groups of statements which belong to different attitudinal or motivational factors to learn English or Czech. These are: instrumentality, international contact, interest in foreign languages, milieu, attitudes to learning English or Czech and effort. In the section of Czech, milieu is not analyzed, but a new one is added; ethnocentrism, as it plays a key role on students' attitudes towards Czech.

The first of these two sections analyses motivational and attitudinal factors regarding the learning of English. In most questions, students answered their degree —from 1 to 5— of agreement or disagreement towards the statement proposed.

The 91 students who fully agreed with the first statement show the importance of English from the point of view of the universities. It states “I was required to know English before coming to the Czech Republic” and 70% of students comply with it. Later in the questionnaire there is a question on the language in which teaching takes place and it shows that 88,4% of the students have all their lessons or most of them in English, while only 11.6% have Czech courses. This means that exposure to Czech is reduced, not only opportunities to listen to Czech but also to speak. This phenomenon, together with the fact that most students have exclusively online courses, decrease very significantly exposure to the local language, which at the same time reduces students' motivation to learn it.

With regard to English, most statements were answered with high amounts of agreement. The first group deals with the instrumentality of English, and not surprisingly, most students fully agree on the following ideas: “Knowing English will help my future career” (88,4%), “Learning English is necessary because it is an international language” (83,1%). In the case of “Studying English is important to me in order to achieve a special goal”, 91,6% of students marked 4 or 5 in their degree of agreement, although in the

statement that asks if students need English to graduate, only 38,5% strongly agreed on it, and even 34,6% think English is not really necessary or not at all in order to graduate. This shows that students are aware of the instrumentality of English and how helpful it will be for them as university students and in their future life. In addition, even if universities allow students to graduate without having a high level of English, it is the students themselves who prefer to learn English throughout university even though it may not be compulsory. In fact, one other question in the survey states “I would study English even if it was not compulsory” and, as expected, 80% of the participants very strongly or fully agree. As English is more than an international language, as it is becoming an administrative requirement for participation in exchange programs, then local foreign language policies should facilitate its acquisition according to official standards rather than letting it be students’ personal task or choice.

Instrumentality is often thought of in academic terms; however, it can also be seen in students’ daily life. 78,4% of the participants fully or very strongly agree on “Learning English will make my experience in the Czech Republic easier”, which means English is not only necessary at school but also in their daily routine, for things such as talking to Czech people at the post office, supermarket or town hall. In this case, it is integrativeness the concept dealt with. This idea is reinforced in a statement in the section of international contact; it asks “I need English in my daily life in the Czech Republic” and 55,9% of the participants fully or very strongly agree. This happens because most locals, at least those of younger generations, have high levels of English, which means that one can make his or her life in the Czech Republic only by knowing English, which is what most students do. In addition, the city of Brno, with three universities, hosts many international students every year and therefore one can find most web pages, posters, menus and more information in both English and Czech. Knowing Czech is helpful, but not necessary.

The next group of statements deals with international contact. 106 students agreed on “English will help me meet, communicate and get involved with more people from all over the world” (81,5%). Same happened with “I need English to travel around Europe” which has 76,7% of strong agreement. Students are aware of the usefulness of English, their attitude towards it is clear: English is important for them and therefore they have to learn it. This is already a factor that increases motivation: the need to learn a language for whatever reasons either academic, or more social ones such as making friends. What is a bit surprising are the answers to the statement “I need English to make friends in the Czech Republic” as only 32,6% fully agree on it. In fact, 19,4% do not really agree on this (they marked 0, 1 or 2 in their degree of agreement), which means that they believe that only with their mother tongue can they start a friendship with other students. This group of students is probably not willing to become friends with international people, or perhaps if their first language is a majority one and there are many speakers of it, they do not feel the need to speak English in order to make friends. This happens with Spanish, many Spanish speakers do not show any willingness to speak a foreign language because simply with all the Spanish speakers living in the Czech Republic, not only from Spain but also Mexico and South American countries, they already have a vast amount of people to become close to. This somehow explains that the statement “I study English in order to have more freedom to express my ideas” only has 56,2% of full agreement.

In regard to the milieu, which is also important in students’ decisions, there is a statement on which most participants agreed: “Most people around me know English” (87,7% of the participants marked 3, 4 or 5). In addition, in a later question which asks the reasons why students are learning English, 37,7% marked “People around me encourage me to learn English”, which means that family and friends also play an important role in the decisions students make and the more one finds English around himself, the more probable it

will be that this individual will keep on learning English, because motivation will increase and attitudes will be more positive. In relation to this and to students' interest in foreign languages there is a statement "In the future, I imagine myself working with people from other countries". In the city of Brno, students find themselves in a very international environment, which makes them more open-minded and willing to experience similar things in the future. This statement received 59,2% of full agreement, and 29,2% of strong agreement. As mentioned before, students are aware of the importance of English in their futures, which eventually happens to be a very motivational force.

In the following question, students had to choose all the reasons, from the available, why they are learning English. The one that got most participants agreeing is "It is an international language", which, as already explored, is widely thought among the students and very influential in students' attitude towards and perception of English. Not many students (19,2%) think English is easy, which is reinforced in the question "English is similar to my mother tongue", in which 52,3% of the students completely or very strongly disagree. However, 52,3% assure that they enjoy it. In comparison to Czech, there is a big difference in these terms, which will be shown in the Czech section. Traveling, as it is very common among young students, is also one of the most chosen reasons for studying English (71,5%). Among the rest of the reasons, the interest in foreign languages is present, as 63,1% of the participants study English for this reason as well.

Regarding effort, there are several statements measuring it; "I am taking an English course because speaking with friends is not enough for me", on which 64,3% of the participants completely or partially disagree, almost the same amount for "I spend a lot of time studying English" (66,1%). However, the statement that measures effort, "I look for options to speak English", received 87,7% of strong or full agreement. This shows two conclusions; that students are determined to learn English, are conscious of its importance

and want to learn it but not really to spend time studying in formal terms, and also that students spend much time listening and speaking English, due to the international environment they live in. English is the language spoken everywhere, so even if the individuals do not choose formal language education, they will be learning English through speaking with both local and foreign people, especially their closest circle; friends.

Learning a foreign language becomes much easier when abroad, seeing how one's communicative and linguistic competence has increased, considerably raises one's self confidence. The statement "I am studying English and I know one day I will be fluent" showed 93,1% of partial or total agreement. Students feel confident towards the language and their accomplishments, which increases their motivation to keep learning.

The last question of the English section asks students about their English level. 56 out of 130 participants have a C1 level, according to CEFR. The next level with a high number of participants is B2 (36,9%) and then 9,2% have a C2. That is to say, most students are very fluent in English, they may have learnt it at home or during their stay in the Czech Republic, but what is clear is that their motivation, self-confidence, positive attitudes towards the language and effort have made them very competent speakers of English.

The last section of the survey explores factors regarding the learning of Czech. Some of the variables that were used in the English section are found here too. The different variables measured are: instrumentality, ethnocentrism, attitudes towards Czech and effort.

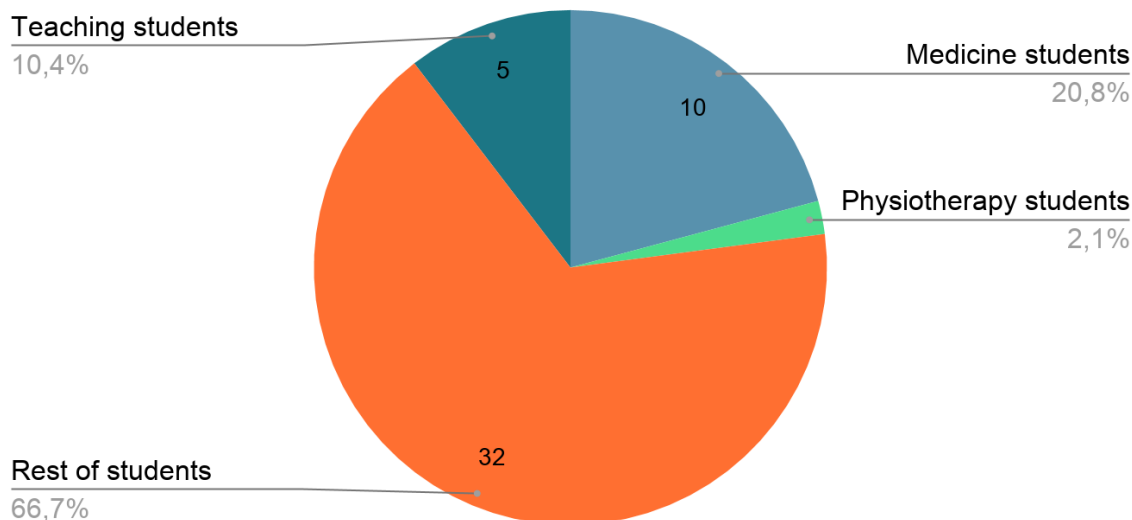
Unlike knowing English, knowing Czech was not a prerequisite for most students before coming to the Czech Republic. 98 participants (77,2%) marked 0 in this statement, almost the opposite to English, in which 70% said that knowing English was a requirement in order to come to the Czech Republic. One of the reasons that explains this phenomenon is the complexity of Czech; it comes from the Slavic languages and does not have many features in common with other groups of languages, which makes it very hard for non-Slavic speakers to

acquire it. This may help explain and understand why universities simply require students to know English rather than Czech.

Nonetheless, the responses are different for “I need Czech in my daily life in the Czech Republic”, as in this case 50,3% of the participants showed partial or total agreement. That is, even if Czech is not compulsory in order to choose the Czech Republic as the country for one’s studies, some people do think it is useful or even necessary to know it. The fact that students are not asked to know Czech by their universities already diminishes its importance, which will influence students’ perception of the language, and eventually, their attitude towards it.

The next group of questions deals with the instrumentality of Czech, but there is controversy among the answers. For instance, “I need Czech in my daily life in the Czech Republic”, already mentioned, received very different opinions; 40,1% are in complete or strong disagreement with the statement whereas 33,8% fully agree on it. The rest (25,9%) fall between 2 and 3. This leads to say that the perception of Czech varies considerably among students; a generalization cannot be done. Many of them see knowing Czech as unnecessary, whereas still 43 participants consider it very important or essential. One of the reasons for this can be found in the degree these participants are studying; out of the 43 who reckon Czech is essential, 11 of them do medicine or physiotherapy, which involves practical lessons at hospitals, and therefore contact with Czech patients, and 5 do teaching, with practical lessons as well, which involve contact with Czech children or teenagers. These situations are a part of students’ daily life and thus this can be one of the reasons why some students may think of Czech as necessary. Undoubtedly, these students will have more reasons to study Czech, however that may or may not increase their motivation to do so.

Students who think Czech is essential in their daily life



The next question asks whether students think they could live in the Czech Republic without knowing Czech and the answers are varied. Although it is a bit surprising that only 12,6% of students fully agree, these responses clearly match with the ones in “I need Czech in my daily life in the Czech Republic”, already discussed in the previous paragraphs. Apart from that, there is one other statement that measures instrumentality (and ethnocentrism, discussed below); “As Czech is only spoken in the Czech Republic, I find it pointless to learn it” on which 70,8% of the participants agreed at different degrees. This clarifies even more international students’ thoughts of Czech instrumentality, and the fact that these students see learning Czech as “pointless” means that their perception of the language is rather a negative one.

The next group of questions explores the construct of ethnocentrism, which, in contrast to the case of English, does play an important role in students’ attitudes towards Czech. “Czech is important in the world” only received 4,8% of strong or complete agreement. These answers are not shocking, as Czech is only spoken in the Czech Republic and Slovakia on a smaller scale. This can help explain, for instance, why most universities do not require students to learn it or why very few students decide to take up Czech language

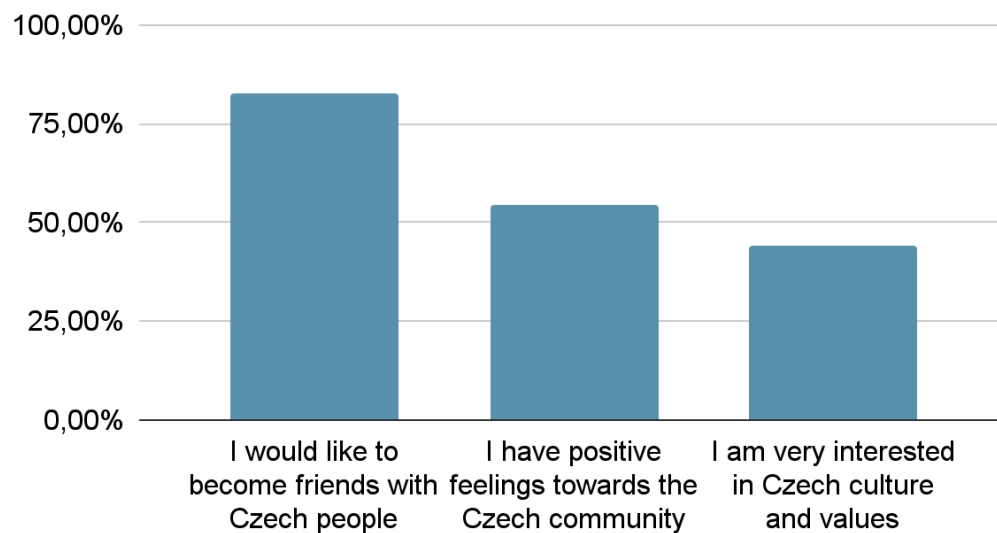
courses; their attitude towards the Czech language is not as positive as towards English, and that negatively influences students' motivation to learn Czech. In this case, the conative component of motivation plays an important role; students' attitude towards the language determines his or her behavior.

Attitudes towards the language may be different from attitudes towards its community of speakers. In fact, 54,3% of the participants chose 3, 4 or 5 in "I have positive feelings towards the Czech community", which is a similar percentage to that found for "I am very interested in Czech culture and values", with 44% of strong or full agreement. After all, it is students themselves that make the choice to come to the Czech Republic, so it can be taken for granted that they have a positive view towards the community, although it may have changed throughout their stay abroad. However, the percentage is smaller than expected, as 45,7% of the individuals showed strong or complete disagreement about this statement, that is to say, their feelings towards the Czech community are negative, or not quite positive. There is a clear difference in the students' view of Czech culture and community, which may have been influenced by their experiences abroad and their contact with the locals. This difference is not found in the English section, as students see English as a lingua franca and its community of speakers, for instance people from the United Kingdom or North America, does not influence their choice to study it. This reflects the affective component of motivation; the person's feelings about the attitude object influence how he or she acts.

According to the definition of ethnocentrism previously provided in this paper, these answers may show that some of the participants of this survey are themselves somehow ethnocentric, meaning that they feel that their own country or community of speakers is somehow superior to the Czech one. However, most participants of this survey can be said to have non-ethnocentric attitudes. This can be seen, for instance, in the question "I would like to become friends with Czech people", 82,7% of the students completely or very fully agree,

and the same happens with the question on openness to different ethnic and cultural groups, on which 68,8% of the participants fully agree. This leads to say that most students chose the Czech Republic with a positive mindset and willingness to interact and connect with the locals, respect and learn their values, culture and, at a lesser extent, their language.

Ethnocentrism



The group that follows explores attitudes towards the Czech language. The difficulty of Czech, one of the biggest barriers that stops students from learning it, is again explored in the following statements: “If Czech was easier, I would definitely try to learn it”, which, again, received mixed answers. Half of the participants agree on this, similar to those in “Czech is very difficult to learn”. These answers are not surprising; only 10 participants of this survey are speakers of Slavic languages like Russian, Bulgarian or Slovenian, to whom learning Czech is supposedly easier. This is also seen in the amount of people who completely agreed on “Czech is similar to my mother tongue” which was only 2,3%. This leads to say that one of the factors that demotivate students to learn Czech is its intrinsic difficulty. As mentioned, Czech does not resemble any other European language, and that,

together with the fact that most international students communicate in English, is a very demotivating factor to start learning Czech.

As previously mentioned, due to the pandemic situation which is taking place, exposure to the local language is reduced. It was already asked whether students have online or in person lessons and the answers and conclusions correlate with the responses to the following statement: “If I had more chances to speak Czech, I would definitely learn it”. 39,1% of the participants showed a very high or full degree of agreement to this question. Exposure to the language is key; the more chances a person has to both listen to and speak the language, the more probable it will be that this person will become more competent. Moreover, this is reinforced by the answers to the following statement: “I find it very interesting to learn Czech”, on which 37,7% of the participants agreed at different levels. That is, many students came to the Czech Republic willing to learn Czech, perhaps it is not great competence what they longed for, but simply to know enough to get by. In fact, 84,3% think that “one should know the basics of Czech in order to live in the Czech Republic”. In the light of the above findings, a return to on-site teaching would probably increase the possibilities of spoken interaction in Czech. One can assume that in an ordinary year, the analysis of this variable would have been different.

Regarding effort, there are several statements that explore it. The first two include “I have taken a course on Czech before coming”, which was not answered very positively (only 20,3% did), and “I tried to learn Czech in the beginning but I gave up” (only 33,3% did), which is not surprising as most students are not required to know Czech. In addition to that, 45,7% showed complete disagreement to “I try to listen to Czech speakers (on the radio, etc.) in order to learn new words”, and similar answers were given for “I look for options to speak Czech”, again because of the lack of demand from the universities, the negative attitudes towards the languages itself and the fact the knowing English is enough to live in the Czech

Republic, among other reasons. Besides, 69,9% assure they only know the basics of Czech, which demonstrates that international students do not devote much effort to learn Czech. This is again reinforced in the statement “I wish I had more time to study Czech”, which only has 14% of full agreement.

The last question of the Czech section has to do with the purpose for learning this language, in the case students are doing so. Most students are not learning Czech, or at least they do not consider so even though they may be acquiring some words informally. 57,8% claim they are not learning Czech; for the rest, they do so for several different purposes. The two most common reflect general interest in foreign languages; “knowing a foreign language and culture will make me more open-minded” and “I love learning foreign languages”. This does not show special interest in Czech but simply learning a second language as a means of being more tolerant towards foreign cultures, or because of personal enjoyment. In fact, the motive “I really enjoy learning Czech” was selected by only 11.7% of the participants. The next most common purpose, though, does involve the Czech community; “I want to understand the way of life of Czech people “. This shows an integrative motivation to learn a language because it is related to the community of speakers, their culture and values, and a willingness from the part of the learner to take part in that community. The next reason most chosen by the participants is an instrumental purpose; learning Czech often gives ECTS to students. This would be a reflection of instrumental motivation, because their purpose does not involve the Czech community but rather a more materialistic goal. The last motive and least chosen to learn Czech is “I was asked to do so by my university” and, as discussed above, this is not a common orientation for students to learn Czech.

4.2. Results obtained in the interviews

Several interviews have been carried out in order to help explain and exemplify the answers obtained in the questionnaire. The participants of these interviews voluntarily offered to further contribute to the analysis of the situation described in this paper.

In the previous sections, a detailed analysis of the answers of the questionnaire was given. It supports some generalizations such as the wide thought that English is necessary in order to live in the Czech Republic and some irregularities, for instance in the perception of Czech language and community. There were also unexpected answers such as the thought that one does not need Czech to live in the Czech Republic and evident responses like the fact that most students think English will help them meet and communicate with people from many countries.

The purpose of the interviews is to clarify some of these answers and assess their full extent, so the inquiries were chosen keeping in mind the above findings. The first idea that demanded clarification was the fact that most students believe knowing Czech is unnecessary to live in the Czech Republic. However, as shown in the previous section, medicine students have practice lessons at the hospital, which involve contact with Czech people, so their answers were completely different. Regarding this, participant 2, a medicine student from Spain, explained that after 8 months in the Czech Republic, she can assure that knowing Czech would have been very helpful. She claimed: “Most of the patients are old so they do not speak English and I cannot understand them without an intermediary, so I learned less than I could have learned if I had known Czech”. However, participant 5 explained that his contact with the locals was very small, and although it is true that he has only been here for one semester, he could not find an experience in which he really needed Czech.

Although it is true that Czech is not strictly necessary to live in the Czech Republic, some participants have shared experiences in which knowing Czech would have been very

helpful. Participant 4 said “I went to the faculty of economics once, but for reasons related to Covid-19, the receptionist would not let me in, and since he did not speak English I could not explain that I actually had an appointment with a teacher” (my translation). On the other hand, though, participant 7 shared his experience at a medical appointment, “the doctor spoke perfect English”, so he did not need any Czech. Similar to what happened to participant 3 at the post office, she said “[...] they had lost my parcel, I tried to explain what had happened, the lady did not speak Czech but she called her colleague, who did know English and we soon fixed the problem”.

One of the generalizations that can be done is that most students feel unmotivated to learn Czech. Participant 3 said “it is very difficult to start learning a new language, and Czech is very difficult itself”, then she added “I am here for one year only, and most of my daily situations can be held in English”. This just reinforces the previous findings; the complexity of Czech and the high number of speakers of English as a second language in the Czech Republic are two demotivating factors.

The next topic explored in the interviews was the perception universities have of Czech. Participant 3 said: “in my university there are many programs in English, not only for Erasmus but also full time students” and also “I wouldn’t see the point if my home university required me to learn Czech, I literally wouldn’t use it at all in my classes”. She believes that going abroad is always an opportunity to learn, in the first place, English, and then the local language if one feels motivated, which is not her case. On the contrary, though, participant 1 was required to take up Czech lessons and she explained “I agree with them making us know the basics of Czech, but not more. [...]. All the information for my studies is in English”. In addition, participant 6 was asked: do you think your home university or your university in the Czech Republic should require you to study Czech? And he replied positively. He said “Czech as a language and not as a medium of instruction would be good” and the two reasons

he gave were the fact that it is the official and widely spoken language in the Czech Republic, and that it would make everyday conversations with the locals easier. The next question he was asked was why most universities do not require student to know Czech and he answered in two ways:

“Universities outside Czechia don’t teach Czech simply because it is a universal language. Unless someone is planning to live, work or interact with the people over here it is not going to provide much value besides acquiring a new language. Czech as a language does not have the same universality attached to it like English does or even some other languages are getting, for instance Mandarin.”

Regarding Czech universities, he explained:

“Universities in Czechia do teach students in Czech in fact more options become available to you if you study in Czech, however, they do provide options for English as well since it allows them to attract more foreign students”.

This last idea was also mentioned in participant 7’s interview, who explained that “I am a full time student at Masaryk University and, without a doubt, I have come across obstacles for not knowing the local language but if studying it had been a requirement, I wouldn’t be here right now”. This shows that international students see the attractiveness of the universities in Brno in the ease to find a degree in English and hence the non-necessity to learn Czech.

5. Conclusions

One of the main areas for conclusions is international students’ attitude towards English, which comprises several aspects of the language. The general attitude is positive, which is reflected in the high levels of English proficiency. This is favored by the potential instrumentality of English; it is an international language and as such, being able to

communicate in it provides students with many opportunities at all levels. In the academic sphere, it will bring opportunities to obtain better jobs and in the social one, it will allow them to reach more communities of people. All this increases students' motivation to learn English considerably, which, together with the universities encouragement to learn it, will lead to high levels of achievement.

Regarding the usefulness of English in the Czech Republic there is another clear finding. Knowing English is a better idea than learning Czech because it allows you to make a normal life abroad, since it is very widely spoken in this country, and at the same time students are learning a language that will certainly be useful in the rest of their life, as it is a majority and international language, characteristics not found in the Czech language. In addition, learning English is significantly easier than learning Czech for most students, which motivated them in a greater scale.

In relation to Czech, the conclusions are different. Most international students' attitude towards Czech is not negative, however the lack of encouragement from universities and its intrinsic difficulty are two demotivating factors for students to learn it. In addition, Czech has been proved not to be strictly necessary but merely helpful when living in the Czech Republic, due to the fact that there is a high level of English among its citizens. So, if Czech or home universities required exchange students to take Czech courses, their attitude would perhaps be different, as their integration within the community of speakers would be greater, or perhaps students would change their mind about living in the Czech Republic.

Particularly this year, the exposure to both languages has been reduced –although much more so regarding Czech– as measures against the spread Covid-19 have reduced contact among people considerably. This is a very demotivating factor, as students have not been able to practice, and, after all, live in a community surrounded by the Czech language.

To sum up, although the present study has shown that it is more fruitful for international students to live in a country where they can easily speak the local language, there are several other factors that contribute to the demotivation of students towards the learning of Czech. On the other hand, as in Czech universities and the communities around them these students can communicate mostly in English and they do so successfully, this is also very positive for them and their experience abroad.

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7. Appendix

Questionnaire.

International students' motivation and attitudes towards learning English and Czech in the Czech Republic.

Hello! I am Belén Portugal, and this questionnaire is part of my final degree dissertation.

It will only take you a few minutes to do it. Don't worry, all your answers are anonymous. Thank you for helping me!

- Your age
- Sex
 - ☐ Female
 - ☐ Male
 - ☐ Prefer not to say
 - ☐ Other
- Home country
- First language
- What do you study?
- My courses are:
 - ☐ Online
 - ☐ In-person
 - ☐ Both
 - ☐ Other:
- How long are you staying in the Czech Republic?
 - ☐ 1 semester
 - ☐ 2 semesters
 - ☐ I am a full degree student
 - ☐ Other:
- How many languages can you speak?

Answer these questions regarding English. Make sure you reply what is true to you.

Strongly disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 strongly agree

- I was required to know English before coming to the Czech Republic
- Knowing English will make my experience in the Czech Republic easier
- Knowing English will help my future career
- Learning English is necessary because it is an international language
- Studying English is important to me in order to achieve a special goal (e.g. to get a degree or scholarship)
- I have to learn English, otherwise I cannot graduate
- I study English in order to have more freedom to express my ideas
- English will help me meet, communicate and get involved with more people from all over the world
- I need English to make friends in the Czech Republic
- I would study English even if it was not compulsory
- I need English in my daily life in the Czech Republic
- I need English to travel around Europe
- I look for options to speak English
- In the future, I imagine myself working with people from other countries
- Most people around me know English
- English is similar to my mother tongue
- I do not enjoy learning English but I do it because I think it is essential
- I am studying English and I know one day I will be fluent
- I am taking an English course because speaking with friends is not enough for me
- I spend a lot of time studying English
- Are your courses in English?

- None of them are in English
- Most of them are in English
- Just a few are in English
- All of them are in English
- I am learning English because (choose as many as you want)
 - people around me encourage me to learn English it is easy
 - I really enjoy it
 - I would like to know many foreign languages I need it to travel
 - it is an international language I need it to make friends
 - my university requires me to study English I am not learning English
 - Other:
- My English level is (according to CEFR)
 - Less than A1
 - C2
 - A2
 - I am a native speaker
 - B1
 - I am not sure
 - B2
 - Other:
 - C1

Answer these questions regarding Czech. Make sure you reply what is true to you.

Strongly disagree 0 1 2 3 4 5 strongly agree

- I need Czech in my daily life in the Czech Republic
- I was required to know some Czech before coming
- I could live in the Czech Republic without knowing Czech
- Czech is important in the world
- I am very interested in Czech culture and values

- As Czech is only spoken in the Czech Republic, I find it pointless to learn it
- I have positive feelings towards the Czech community
- I think you should know at least the basics of Czech if you want to live in the Czech Republic
- I would like to become friends with Czech people
- Czech is very difficult to learn
- I consider myself to be open to other ethnic and cultural groups
- Czech is similar to my mother tongue
- If Czech was easier, I would definitely try to learn it
- I find it very interesting to learn Czech
- I do not have many chances to learn Czech
- I have taken a course (even duolingo counts!) on Czech before coming
- I try to listen to Czech speakers (on the radio, etc.) in order to learn new words
- I have made no effort to learn Czech
- I only know the basics of Czech
- I tried to learn Czech in the beginning but I gave up
- I wish I had more time to study Czech
- I look for options to speak Czech
- I am learning Czech because...
 - o it gives me ECTS
 - o I want to understand the way of life of Czech people I really enjoy learning Czech
 - o I am asked to do so by my university I love learning foreign languages

- knowing a foreign language and culture will make me more open-minded I am not learning Czech
 - Other:
-
- After this questionnaire, I will be doing short interviews on the same topic to 5 participants. Please, if you do not mind being interviewed, leave me your email.
Thanks a lot!
 - Feel free to add here any comments